

THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

Office of the prime Minister

National Policy on Ethiopian Women

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Section One

Introduction

Ethiopia women are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. The fact that women are both producers and procreators, as well as active participants in the social, political and cultural activities of their communities has enabled them to play an all round role. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in the country (which constitute discrimination against women) have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labor. Thus, deprived of equal opportunities, they are made to lag behind men in all fields of self advancement.

Women constitute proportionally a large group of the labor force in various economic sectors. Therefore economic development is unthinkable without the participation of women. However, to date, Ethiopian women have not been able to equally benefit for the nation's wealth, because their labor and their participation in the economy have not been duly valued.

Though women's share of the division of labor differs from place to place and from culture to culture, their average working day is believed to vary between 13 and 17 hours per day. Actually, women involved in farming activities tend to even work longer hours. Urban women engaged in labor-intensive activities that require little or no skill spend no less time.

As child bearers, women have direct contact with the younger generation of the labor force. They can, therefore, influence their children both positively and negatively, especially during (the periods of the latter's) infancy and childhood period. In this vein, the key role they play as mothers makes their advice more heeded than that of men.

Furthermore, since women make a major contribution to the welfare of society, they are in a better position to promote and/or eliminate harmful traditional customs and practices of their localities.

As stated above, although women's contribution to economic development and the welfare of the society is both significant and multi-faceted, the economic, political and cultural bias against them has hindered women from enjoying the fruits of their contribution, unlike their male peers.

Ethiopian women were compelled to play a unique role during the civil war, which was instigated by the previous regimes as well as during the famine, displacement and drought conditions. The unique role women played thus, far has managed to create the impetus towards giving special attention to women, and provide the opportunity to actively participate in the national development, and to guarantee women their right to enjoy the fruits of their labor. It has also created a **modus operandi** which is free from any form of partiality and sexual discrimination more than ever before.

Soon after the downfall of the justice-flouting and belligerent **Derg**, which was brought down by the heroic struggle of the Ethiopian peoples, the various political and national organizations, by setting aside their differences, formed a Transitional Government which accepted peace as its main principle of governance in its charter. That accomplishment has indisputably ushered in a period of relief to all Ethiopians, especially to women.

The democratic process could, therefore, grow and develop effectively when all peoples are given equal opportunity to exercise their democratic rights, and when women can benefit from the fruits of their labor on an equal basis with men in an atmosphere free of outdated male-chauvinist attitudes. With this realization, the Transitional Government has given priority to the speeding up of equality between men and women.

To that end, it is essential to improve the level of income of a woman, and to facilitate their labor at the appropriate place and benefit there from, as well as improve the health and nutrition of mothers and their children, and to upgrade and improve their education. It is also necessary to facilitate favorable conditions for the formation of women`s associations as well as strengthen the existing associations, so that women can solve their own problems. After all, it is only when these conditions are facilitated that women can participate in the national development effort on an equal term with their men counterpart, and benefit from their participation.

Women have actively participated in many public uprisings. And they have, as a result made substantial contributions to the struggle Ethiopia people waged to ensure their rights and freedom. They have not, however, benefited from the fruits of their struggle. Their struggle has not been institutionalized; hence, it has not been included as an important element of government development programmes.

Before the 1974 Revolution, women`s organized activities were run mainly by non-governmental bodies such as the Ethiopia Women`s Welfare Association, the Ethiopian officer`s Wives Association, the Ethiopia females Students` Association, among other. These Associations were, however, limited in scope, and only concentrated in cities. Consequently they had little or no impact on government policies, laws, regulations and development programmes.

After 1974, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women`s Association (**REWA**) was established by proclamation. This organization was, however, too monolithic and too close to the **Derg** and (**WPE**) to be of any use to women. The purpose of its establishment was, in fact, the consolidation of the **Derg`s** power. As such, promoting the interests of women was not high on the list of its agenda. Nor was it structured so as to influence government policies and help to women benefit from development programmes. The result was that there had not been any improvement in the lives (economic, social, and Political) of Ethiopia women, especially of those who live in the rural areas.

Even though few development agencies, particularly the NGO`s which were engaged in relief and rehabilitation work, had attempted to incorporate women`s issues into their work programmes, they have not shown much result as they have been expected to. This was because the previous government has not given the development of women the priority it deserved and it has not, therefore, created an atmosphere conducive to the implementation of development programs on women.

Up until now the governments of Ethiopia had not had any policy as regards to Women`s affairs, nor had there been a government body in charge of such matters. Consequently, development projects that were meant to help women be they governmental or NGO-managed were characterized by lack of coordination and by duplication, besides failing to hit their targets.

The necessity of planning out what must be done, drawing lessons from past failures and experiences, and believing that gender issues concern not only women but society at large and that women`s problems cannot be solved by women alone, but by the coordinated efforts of the society, the government and women, is no longer disputable

Women should not be restricted to any one association; instead, they should be free to form associations of their choice in accordance with their specific needs or professions. To that end, it is necessary to plan and facilitate conditions conducive to making women initiate ideas and work in a coordinated manner. Hence, the government has the obligation to give its unreserved support, and create favorable conditions for promoting their interests.

This policy on Ethiopian Women has, therefore, been formulated to focus on what the Government ought to do for women, and what women must do for themselves through their own free associations, as well as to show the relationship between the two. The policy is based on the principles mentioned above.

The Condition of Ethiopian Women

In Ethiopia gender bias is manifested in the following scenarios:

1. Working Conditions

1.1 In the Rural Areas

About 88 percent of Ethiopians live in the rural areas. Because of the rudimentariness of the methods of production used in the rural areas, nearly 85 percent of women's labor is wasted on such arduous activities as farming and animals husbandry activities in which traditional technique of production is applied. Even though, the division of labor differs from place to place, depending on the climatic conditions, women participate in all types of agricultural work, including weeding, raking harvesting and preparing trashing field and grain bins. For instance, women in nomadic societies are entrusted with the responsibility of erecting mobile huts, dismantling them and carrying the parts to the next place of stay, in addition to cattle raising and herding. With respect to house work, rural women have to grind grain, fetch water, gather firewood, prepare cow dung for use, either as a substitute for or as a supplementary to firewood, prepare food and raise children. And they sweat out for about 13 to 17 hours a day. Although rural women's share of the division of labor is by far more tiresome and more time-consuming than that of men, it is derogatorily referred to as "women's work" and is not valued. Rural women have also been barred from access to productive assets, such as ownership and control of property, since their contribution continued to be undervalued.

1.2 In the Urban Areas

Majority of the low-wage-earners in the urban areas are women. In the factories, for instance, women make up 30 percent* of the labor force, whereas their share of total salaries paid is only 21 percent. Although a very small number of women hold high-position jobs that require college training and technological know-how, most Ethiopia women are engaged in all types of odd jobs. These include low-income jobs, such as selling injera (the pancake like traditional food) and tella (the traditionally brewed beer), working as house maids as well as prostitution and brothel or bar management. Working as house maid is, of course, the first occupation youngest women who move to cities from rural areas in search of a better life embark on. Prostitution, for example, is an occupation frowned upon by all societies, degrading to women, a manifestation of backwardness and a breeding ground for many kinds of diseases and social evils. Yet a staggeringly large numbers of Ethiopia women derive their livelihood from it, because they have no alternative employment opportunity. To sum up, urban women are engaged in such low paying jobs in the informal sector as well as in the formal sector, such as in factories, offices, hospitals etc.¹

1.2.1. The Formal sector

According to the study done by the Ministry of labor and Social Affairs in 1988, the number of male employed in both the public and private sectors, where employment opportunities are limited, was about 82.1 percent of the total work force; whereas women constitute only 17.9 percent. A related source of information showed that among those workers who have been employed through the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Civil - Service Commission, the number of women is much lower. Moreover, as discussed above, the number of women holding high position is/or negligible low. That, of course, is a good indicator of the urgency and the seriousness of the situation of Ethiopia women.

* According to a 1988 study done by the ministry of labor and social Affairs

The number of businesswomen is relatively low. Actually, most women are engaged in the service sector as bar, groceries and restaurants owners, because they lack the appropriate skills and capital. All these facts portend a dire situation.

1.2.2. The informal Sector

A very large number of women, especially young women, non-literate female headed house hold or widowers, eke out a living engaged in such activities of the informal sector as gathering and selling firewood, hawking cheap goods and services, selling **Tella** and working as maid servants or prostitutes. Even though these activities, falling under the informal sector, are undocumented, they bear witness to the miserable conditions Ethiopian women live in.

2. Social Services

2.1 Social Issues

Rural young women who move to cities and become prostitutes or drug addicts often end up becoming juvenile delinquents. The rest take low paying jobs that require little or no skill. On top of that some of them get raped and give birth to children they have to raise on their own. Furthermore, women- more than men bear the brunt of civil wars, drought, displacements, health problems, and disruptions of normal life as a result of natural and man- made disasters.

2.2 Health

The most striking thing about the overall health condition of Ethiopian women is that, it is pathetic. Between 19 to 60 percent of women suffer from inadequate nutrition. The reason for that are varied and complex. Worse yet, though only about five percent of pregnant women have access to the services of trained midwives, the rest have to

settle for traditional midwives. Our country is therefore, top among the 37 least-developed countries in so far as deaths resulting from child- birth complications are concerned. On the other hand, we are unparalleled as regards to fertility, whereby an Ethiopian woman, on the average, gives birth to seven children. About 98 percent of mothers and potential mothers have no access to family planning. Therefore, most women lack the knowledge about the spacing of children, the problems of premature pregnancy as well as post- prime- age pregnancy.

2.3 Harmful Customs and Practices

Though the figure varies from one culture to another as well as between different ethnic groups and regions, at least nearly 50 percent of Ethiopians who are affected by harmful customs and practices (these make up 60 percent of the population) are women. True, both men and women are victims as well as promoters of harmful practices, as they are both products of the same culture. Women's share of the victimization is, however much greater. If a woman exhibits intelligence, she is taken for a crafty person; if she dares to express her views, she is labeled "long- tongued;" if she happens to be gutsy and vigorous, she is dubbed "masculine;" if she is not hard-working, she is considered to be not only lazy but lacking cooking and house- keeping skills as well. Women are, as a whole, viewed as a personification of weakness and as treacherous beings who do their duties if and when live in remote areas are usually forced to marry before they reach puberty- the marriage being either per-arranged by their parents or forced upon them through kidnapping. That Ethiopian women are victims of circumscion; and other harmful practices that come with child- birth is also common. We also know that these practices contribute to women's dying while in labor. Such harmful customs and practices must be eliminated, for they stand in the way of progress and endanger lives. They should not be allowed to perpetuate. Both men and women have to be made aware of these harmful practices at all available forums, especially in the classroom.

2.4 Education

Even though the education policy of our country does not make explicit distinction between sexes, it promotes male supremacy indirectly. Traditional education

in Ethiopian advocates the categorization of subjects into “those that may be given to both boys and girls” and “those that are taught exclusively to boys.” Both the explicit and implicit ways of promoting male supremacy are recurring themes in many writings, speeches, paintings, fables and proverbs. One could, therefore, rightly say that our country’s curriculum is still discriminatory toward girls and women.

Fifty percent of the Ethiopian population comprises of women. But they make up only 23 percent of the student population. Below is a breakdown of female students as given in a 1989 report by the Ministry of Education.

Percentage of Female Students at the Different Levels of Education

Level of Education	Percentage of Female
Elementary School	30
Junior High School	41
High School	30
Junior College	14.5
Four – Year College (Degree Providing Colleges)	8.2
Graduate School	6.4

As shown in the table, the number of female students decreases as the level of education rises. The table shows that the number of female students that fail examinations and drop out of school, too, is great. For example, the fact that their percentage was 41 at the junior high school level, but much less later means, many of them fail the ninth- grade entrance national examination. At any rate, what we learn from the report is that distinction is made between men and a woman as far as access to education is concerned.

3. Law

The laws of the land, like many other things, are also prejudicial to women. As such, they reflect and reinforce society's backward attitude toward women, no less than certain cultures and religions do. Consequently, they are obstacles to women's attempts at having their right, to enjoying the fruits of their labor and participation ensured.

Laws are reflections of society's political and economic life. If we, for example, take a look at the laws decreed in Ethiopia 40 years ago, we will notice at once that they are discriminatory toward women. That is true especially about the articles concerning citizenship, the family and retirement benefits. Women have actually long been unable to have their rights ensured by making proper use of the legal instruments available to them on equal terms with men due to dissuading societal pressure, lack of legal knowledge and fear of court appearance. Though laws do not solve all problems, they have to be modified with a view to making them effective instruments for safeguarding democratic rights.

Summary

The condition of Ethiopian women has been elaborated above, and their problems can be summarized as follows:

1. The majority of Ethiopian women have been barred from owning the means of production, valuable products and property and thus lack the clout that comes with the owning of property. They are, therefore, unable to perform even minor public functions in their communities or to participate in the formulation of government policy or to hold public office at any level.
2. Foremost among the victims of such natural and man-made disasters as wars, famine, displacement and emigration are women and children.
3. The prejudicial attitude prevalent in the country's political, social and economic life made it difficult to ensure the full development and advancement of women in all fields on an equal basis with their male counterparts. Based on this attitude, the laws too reflect the idea of the inferiority of women. Furthermore, most women seem to have been conditioned into holding the same discriminatory views about themselves. That, of course, is a good indicator of the need to address the problem without delay.

Discrimination against women is perpetuated in various ways depending on their ethnic background, culture and religion. Nonetheless, an in-depth study has not yet been

undertaken to determine the exact conditions women are in the various regions and among the different ethnic group. Hence, it is important to establish women`s affairs bureaus in all regions, at the zonal, woreda and kebele levels.

A National policy on women`s Affairs, which is based on the respect for human and democratic rights without distinction, as set out in the charter, and on the international agreements and conventions to which our country is a signatory (for example, the convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW December 19,1974) shall have the unreserved support of all and forces organizations.

Section Two

Objectives of the policy

1. Facilitating conditions to the speeding of equality between men and women so that women can participate in the political, social and economic life of their country on equal terms with men and ensuring that their right to own property as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of their fruits of their labor or from performing public functions and being decision makers;
2. Facilitating the necessary condition whereby rural women can have access to basic social services and to ways and means of lightening their work-load; and
3. Eliminating, step by step, prejudices as well as customary and other practices that are based on the idea of male supremacy and enabling women to hold public office and to participate in the decision making process at all levels.

Contents of the policy

1. Ensuring the full development and advancement of women and guaranteeing them the enjoyment of their democratic and human rights so that they can participate in the economic, social and political life of their country on equal basis with men;
2. Modifying or abolishing existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which aggravates discrimination against women and facilitating conditions conducive to their participation in the decision- making process at all levels;
3. Creating a situation whereby society's discriminatory attitude toward women and women's complacency about it are eliminated through an elevated awareness;
4. Making sure that women participate in the formulation of government policies, laws, regulation programmers, plans and projects that directly or indirectly benefits and concern women as well as in the implementation there of;

5. Encouraging research work on ways and means of lightening the work- load of women as well as increasing their income and compiling the results thereof for use by others, too;
6. Coordinating all government programmers that concern women and following up their implementation to make sure that they are free from duplication and that they do not involve unnecessary costs;
7. Incorporating women's affairs into the government structure and entrusting a government body with it as well as establishing branches thereof in all ministries and governmental organization;
8. Making sure that government policies, laws, regulations, plans and other activities are based on the following objectives;
 - Ensuring that distinction on the basis sex is not made that a special attention is given to rural women in view of the fact that they face particular problems and shoulder a heavier burden;
 - Ensuring that women are involved in the elaboration, implementation and decision-making process;
 - Making sure that women participate in the fields of development activity and enjoy the benefits thereof on an equal basis with men and guaranteeing them legal protection of the rights.

Strategies for the implementation of the policy

1. All appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure that the democratic and human rights of women are respected by guaranteeing them their freedom of speech, writing, peaceful assembly and forming associations as well as their right to work in governmental or non-governmental organization, their right to form and join lawful organizations and their right to vote or be elected;
2. The Government shall facilitate conditions conducive to the participation of women in both the elaboration and decision-making process as regards to community

developments, social welfare, division of land property, education and basic social services;

3. All appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure that women are made beneficiaries on an equal basis with men of equal pay for equal work and of promotions, of appointments, of desirable transfers or termination of employment and of training;
4. The Government shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure that the right of women to work in the Civil service in any capacity they prove to be competent for, their right to equal pay for equal work and to perform public functions, including decision- making in both their local communities and at the national level, are respected;
5. The right of women to get career and vocational guidance at any institution of education, to have access to the same curricula as that for men and to choose their field of study shall be ensured;
6. The Government, with cooperation from the peoples of Ethiopia, shall facilitate conditions conducive to the informing and educating of concerned communities about such harmful practices as circumscion and the marriage of young girls before they reach puberty;
7. The Government shall ensure to women the right to have easy access to basic health care facilities, information about traditional and modern family planning method- including suckling – and other services;
8. Maximum effort shall be made to eliminate, step by step, prejudices and customary practices based on the idea that women are inferior to men and to repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women;
9. The necessary conditions where by women can have effective legal protection of their rights shall be facilitated;

10. Women who have particular problems as a result of natural and man- made disasters shall be given special aid promptly;
11. There shall, in all ministries and governmental organizations, be a Department of Women's Affairs entrusted with the responsibility of organizing women and promoting their interests;
12. Research shall be done on some ways and means of lightening the work- load of women, especially of those who live out in the rural areas; income generating projects, programmers' or other schemes shall be streamlined to them and they shall, through vocational training be made to increase their technical proficiency and thus develop self confidence;
13. The necessary conditions where by women can obtain training and education shall be facilitated, for the development of their potentialities cannot be achieved only through the existence of structures and organization responsible for promoting their interests;
14. Appropriate support shall be extended to all women's associations formed with their initiative and full consent and those that will be formed in the future;
15. The Government shall ensure that women are the beneficiaries of the aid that donor countries and international non-governmental organizations send to them and that the activities of donors are not duplicated as a result of the newly- found democracy and the freedom guaranteed in the New Economic policy but are instead coordinated;
16. Conditions conducive to the mobilization of all manpower, technical and material resources of the country to the implementation of the policy shall be facilitated;
17. All appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure the right of women to the same retirement age and benefits as those of men and their right to an equal protection of the law and to a fair trial in a court of law.

Section Three

A. IMPLIMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Duties and Responsibilities of Women's Affairs Sector in the Prime Minister Office

1. The sector shall be accountable to the prime minister and shall be responsible for the coordination, facilitation and monitoring of women's affairs activities at national level.
2. It shall initiate proposals for policies to be issued at national level and strive for the enactment of new policies and the improvement of existing ones in accordance with the political and economic growth of the country.
3. It shall create conducive atmosphere for the implementation of women's affairs policy in various governmental organizations and the country in general and monitor its realization.
4. It shall encourage women to struggle for their rights by organization themselves in accordance with their needs interests and the nature of their problems as well as coordinate their efforts and create favorable conditions to this effect.
5. It shall encourage the establishment of women affairs organs in all the regions, central ministries and public organizations at all levels, as well as the formation of self initiated women's organizations in order to strengthen and expand the activities of the Ethiopian women. It also maintains close working relationship with such organizations.
6. It shall cause the creation of fora whereby governmental and non-governmental women's organizations will get to know each other and exchange their experiences.
7. It shall coordination the financial and material aids to be secured from various sources.
8. It shall process information and reports to be receive from women's affairs departments and self initiated women's organization and provide solution to their problems in consultation with higher authorities.

9. It shall collect and undertake studies focusing on the problems of Ethiopian women, and encourage individuals and organizations involved in such studies, and devise strategies for the provision of practical solutions to these problems. It shall also carry- out periodic assessments.
10. It shall organize seminars, workshops and symposiums at the national level.

B. The Regional Women's Affairs Sector

1. The sector shall be headquarters in the respective Regional Administrative offices and be accountable to the Region's Administrative Council. It shall, as a responsible organ coordinate and facilitate activities related to women's affairs.
2. It shall organize women's affairs bureaus in every region coordination governmental and non-governmental organizations activities related to women and create favorable condition to enhance coordinated programs.
3. It shall devise ways means for an effective implementation of the policy of women's affairs.
4. It shall create favorable conditions for effective implementation of the policies on women's affairs issued by the government in governmental and non-governmental organization within the region and follow- up their implementation.
5. Upon the assessment of women's activities, it shall present to the government new policy proposals when deemed necessary.
6. It shall encourage women to make active participation in various activities and provide assistance for the strengthening of women's affairs offices within the region.
7. It shall strive to create for a whereby various women departments and self- initiated organizations get together and exchange their experience.
8. It shall ensure that women have full participation in the training, promotion and transfer decisions in the region and provide the necessary support for its realization.

9. It shall make efforts to raise women's capacity in expressing their problems, and monitor the degree of their participation in every bureau.
10. It shall compile information and reports to be received from women's affairs departments and self- initiated women organizations within the region.
11. It shall ensure whether gender issues are properly reflected in the preparation of every development plan, researches and studies, as well as make amendments and ensure its implementation.
12. It shall assign studies, researches and reports with regard to the situation of women and in accordance with the responsibilities and duties of their organization. It shall also encourage researchers and collect researches.

C. Women's Affairs Department in Ministries and Public Organizations

1. Women's Affairs Department shall be established in governmental organizations at department level. They shall be accountable to the organization in which they are formed and have equal power with other departments.
2. It shall monitor, follow up and design ways of implementing the national women's affairs policy effectively in accordance with the powers and duties of the organization in which it is based.
3. It shall create favorable conditions for effective implementation of the policies of women's affairs issued by the government in organizations in which they are based and closely monitor their implementations.
4. It shall present policy proposal for higher authorities by closely monitoring women's activities.
5. It shall encourage women in the organization to make active participation in various activities.
6. It shall organize experience sharing fora by making contacts with various departments for women's affairs and self- initiated women organizations.

7. It shall monitor the full participation of women in training promotion and transfer decisions in their organization, and shall provide the necessary support for their implementations.
8. It shall monitor women's participation in the organization and help in raising their capacity to express their problems.
9. It shall monitor and assess the proper treatment of gender issues during the preparation of plans, studies and researches and shall ensure that the necessary amendments are made.
10. It shall assess whether the policies, programmes, development plans issued by the government are suitable for safeguarding the benefits of women and that these have been accorded particular considerations.

Conclusion

Having given priority to guaranteeing to women their human and democratic rights, the transitional Government of Ethiopia has come up with this policy- that is, the National policy on Ethiopian women.

The policy is expected to serve as an instrument of ensuring to women, especially rural women, the enjoyment of the fruit of their labor on equal terms with men and their right to own property. It also helps to facilitate conditions conducive to the active participation of women in the political, social and economic life of their country by performing all public functions and holding public office at all levels. In short, the National policy on Ethiopian Women we believe shall speed equality between men and women.

The responsibility of ensuring the implementation of the policy, of course, lies mainly with the Government. So, representing the Government, the Women's Affairs Sector in the office of the Prime Minister shall draw up the appropriate plans of action and shall facilitate favorable conditions for the effective implementation of the policy. It shall also develop.

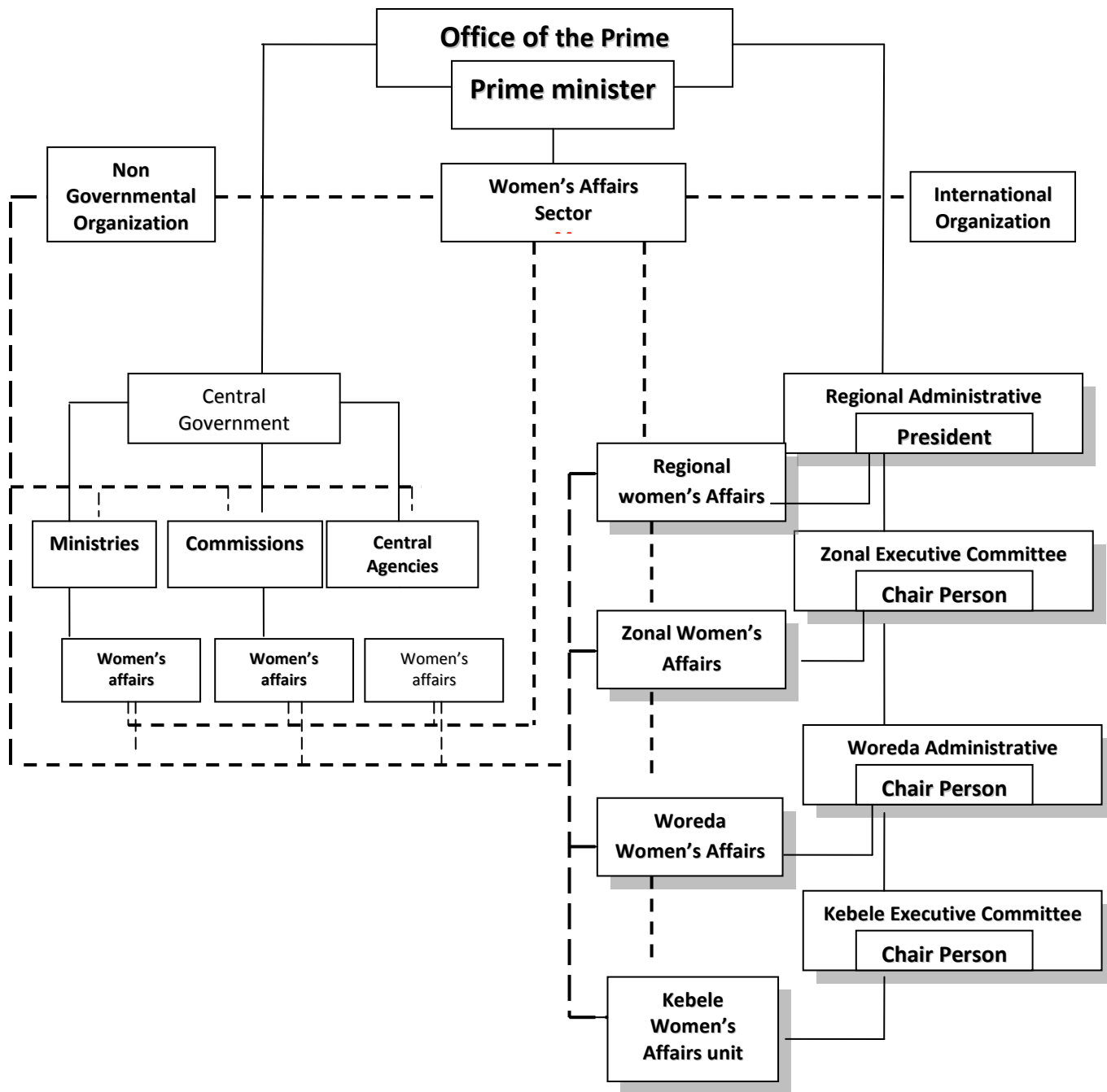
The potentialities and awareness of women with a view to organizing them into a self-helping political and economic force by giving them the guidance they need. Likewise, the

departments of women's affairs in all the regions, Ministries and other governmental organizations shall closely supervise the implementation of the policy and do everything within their power to promote women's interests.

All NGO's and donor countries engaged in development activities here in Ethiopia too are expected to do their utmost toward the implementation of the policy.

The active participation of all Ethiopians in general and women in particular is, as stated earlier, vital for the efficacy of the policy's implementation. The welfare of women is after all, every Ethiopian's concern.

**The Organizational System for the Implementation of
National Women's Affairs Policy**



———— Direct Accountability
----- Working Relationships